Programme

Monday 5-7 pm, Lecture Hall 10

15.04.2024 Book Launch
Life Worlds in Crisis
Andrea Behrends, Mirjam de Bruijn, Julia Pauli

22.04.2024 Lecture
The Ram Temple Movement and the Unmaking of Indian Secularism
Jaspal Singh

29.04.2024 Lecture
The Obscure Object of Population: Notes from a Shrinking, Aging Island
Tyler Zoanni

06.05.2024 Lecture
Normal Crises: The Politics of Violence and Peace in Africa
Elísio Macamo

13.05.2024 Lecture
Developmentalism, Debt Crises, and African Political Economy
Abotebuno Isaac Akolgo

27.05.2024 Lecture
Costumes and Kin: The Making and Unmaking of Female Togetherness in Accra
Ann Cassiman

03.06.2024 Lecture
More than just Jihadism: Changes in Pastoralism and its Consequences
Söhne Stöckmann

10.06.2024 Lecture
From Hope to Despair: Democracy, Social Conflict and the Making of an African Crisis
Edlyne Anuguwon

17.06.2024 Lecture
Curiosity in Crisis? An Exploration of In/Different Perspectives
Susann Ludwig

24.06.2024 Lecture
Social Chronicity Revisited
Henrik Vigh

01.07.2024 Lecture
Breathing Well in Dhaka? How a City Inspires and Suffocates (More Than) Human Life
Nasima Selm

Un/making Global crisis

Lecture Series in Summer Term 2024
Institutes of Anthropology and African Studies, Leipzig University
Prof. Dr. Andrea Berehnds, Ph. D. Lara Krause-Alzaid

The impression of unsolvable wars, of unsustained hopes to stop carbon emissions soon enough, of flagrant inequalities and the uncertainty of futures are topics that preoccupy us – on different levels, but all at the same time. The notion of an omnipresence and overlap of crises has become common sense. When Covid-19 ended, war in Ukraine began. And while the wars in Ukraine and in Sudan continue, the war in the Middle East took center stage in the media. One form of activism replaces the former. But will they be effective?

Talking about crisis means pausing and disentangling the fast momentum that crisis implies. It means to ask how crises are made and unmade by politics, by the media, by activism, by defining them as such. What gets to be a “global crisis” and what does not is subject to power-saturated, unequal practices. When crisis is proclaimed, it calls for interventions, security debates, regulations, maybe armament, but also for protests, activism, fear and hope. But by making one crisis central in the media, another one loses this attention and becomes invisible – and thus gets “unmade” although the problems persist.

We wish to provide a space for speakers and audience to focus on the slash in “un/making crises”: centering the simultaneity and complexity of different (historical and current) processes, practices, technologies, actors and interests at play in, and brought forth through crises. Contributions will critique the concept of crisis, focus on global flows and processes in their un/making, or provide insights into local practices that emerge in response to declared – and experienced - crises. In all that, we ask: What hopes do crises also hold for better futures, new beginnings, and planetary shifts?
22.04.2024 Lecture
The Ram Temple Movement and the Unmaking of Indian Secularism
Jaspal Singh

This chapter presents a sociolinguistic analysis of a current political project that aims to saffronise India. I study two recent discursive events, the staging of national unity and Hindu superpower by means of erecting colossal statues and the renaming of cities that bear a recognisable Muslim toponym, to show how saffronisation is part of a larger branding of India as a non-secular Hindu Nation. This branding circulates alternative narratives in public discourse that erase the historical achievements of postcolonial India’s secular architects, as well as the role that Muslims played in India’s history, and instead enregister recognisable Hindu elements as political symbols for a vision of a new Hindu India. This sociolinguistic saffronisation is dangerous insofar as it might incite and further normalise communal violence.

Keywords: Saffronisation, Hindutva, Erasure, Enregisterment, Statues, Toponomy

29.04.2024 Lecture
The Obscure Object of Population: Notes from a Shrinking, Aging Island
Tyler Zoanni

Much critical social science scholarship on population politics, whether older writings on biopower or more recent STS analyses of data practices, assume that populations are all made up, and readily so. Thinking historically and ethnographically about Mauritius, this talk explores some ways that populations often prove obscure, elusive, and unstable. It centers two quite different, but related moments: efforts to control explosive population growth in mid-twentieth century Mauritius and contemporary anxieties about the island nation-state’s shrinking and aging population in the twenty-first century. The upshot is a call to reconsider how scholars, policymakers, and activists tend to think and act in relation to something called “population.”

27.05.2024 Lecture
Costumes and kin: the making and unmaking of female togetherness in Accra
Ann Cassiman

A common practice in West-Africa, especially among women, is to sew matching outfits made from the same fabric to wear on large public occasions, as an expression of solidarity and unity, but also as a spectacle of cosmopolitanism and self-making. The larger and more visible the groups wearing these ‘uniforms’, the more grandiose and spectacular the celebration.

In the popular neighbourhoods of the zongos (Hausa-speaking migrant communities) in Accra, the practice of yaayi (Hausa for ‘uniform’) has expanded to larger transnational networks beyond the family, including colleagues, members of associations, friends and neighbours. I will show how the practice of yaayi is now rocking in young women’s relentless efforts to shine and show off, and how it has become the focus of heated debates among women about shifting social obligations, morality, and consumer culture.

As a material manifestation and validation of extended relationships, yaayi functions not only as a technology of kinning in heterogeneous zongo communities, but paradoxically also as a technology of exclusion and shame, especially for those with limited financial and social means. My paper follows a group of seamstress apprentices preparing for their own graduation. As I will show, at the heart of doing yaayi is to ally with others while outshining them, embodied in one’s individual style, finish and workmanship. Yaayi thus redraws not only the lines of togetherness, but also those of social inequality, highlighting the new fissures of financial (in)capacity and skill. Finally, the graduation ceremony is the ultimate moment to publicly demonstrate one’s ability to juggle solidarity and rivalry on the public sartorial stage.
From a European perspective, West Africa is portrayed as a region of multiple crises such as war, Islamist jihadism and migration. These crises have dire consequences for the local population, with the threat of insecurity and social conflict impacting negatively on development in the continent. Incidentally, the faults of democracy and social crisis can be related to the conditions under which these nations emerged independent. But while the crises in Africa may seem peculiar and manifest in distinct forms, they feed on and are reinforced by global fissures and contentions around religion, politics, economy, and power. For instance, the proliferation of terrorist groups and activities in West Africa and the Horn of Africa have no doubt drawn impetus from global terrorist groups like al-Qaida, the IS and others. Therefore, the global flows and processes of terrorism have found habitation in Africa and have in the process simultaneously afflicted democracy and governance. Also, the overriding influence of neoliberal capitalism, especially its globalizing financial impacts and resulting developments in critical public spheres in the developing world, has created and reinforced the context of crisis and underdevelopment in Africa in recent decades. It is the failure of democracy and the form of governance it generates. Thus, democracy has neither been the harbinger of development nor the instrument for untangling embedded tensions webbed around power, ethnicity, and religion in these nations. Apart from the deleterious effects social crisis exerts on current sociopolitical developments, it does not bode well for the future. It signals both uncertainty and the tenacity of relating democracy to development and growth in the continent. However, even amid crisis, these nations creatively envision pathways to survive and avoid implosion, though on fragile grounds. Thus, the proposed discourse envisages a sociohistorical overview of the origins and dynamics of crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa especially how the crisis fed by domestic and external global forces unmake and reimagine the state project in the continent.

Ethnographic research allows researchers to immerse in the now and be surprised by whatever pops up. Stumbling upon a puzzle, assumptions are challenged and, thus, curiosity is triggered. Looking for clues to solve the puzzle, it is hard not to lose the puzzle. I anchor crisis in this paradox relationship between puzzle and solution and, thus, ask: what if I was indifferent to the solution of the puzzle and much more interested in maintaining and cultivating what is puzzling about it? By way of imagining a decolonial response to the crisis of research in Area Studies, Keguro Macharia (2016) highlights waywardness, which he describes as „a stubborn refusal to come to the point”. Inspired by this particular notion, I map out a few wayward moments from the field, i.e. a family courtyard in Bamako, Mali, a multipurpose venue in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, an interdisciplinary workshop on the Square Kilometer Array Observatory (SKAO) in Accra, Ghana and a desk or two in the city of Leipzig, Germany. So, in this presentation, I examine the relationship between crisis and scientific research by focusing on my own ethnographic practice. In doing so, I explore an epistemic otherwise, which does not settle for a point, and instead plays with the puzzle.